



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## ANOTHER VIEW OF THE UNION LABEL.

BY STARR HOYT NICHOLS.

---

IN an article published in a recent number of this REVIEW Miss M. E. J. Kelley sets forth the value and importance of the device of the union label as an instrument for improving the conditions of work among laborers. Like all its advocates, she approves of it as a means for insuring the production of goods under circumstances favorable to the health and comfort and proper wage-remuneration of artisans. She believes that its adoption tends to abolish the miseries of the sweat-shop, tenement-house production, the employment of children, danger of infection from contact with disease, and all other undesirable proximities. Seeing in the union label a working instrument available for such excellent uses, she naturally lauds it and hopes great things from an increase of its use by manufacturers of every kind. Some misgivings, however, as to other purposes to which the label is put seem to flit like thin clouds over the sky of her hopes, and to darken the prospect, though she makes but light account of those in comparison with its array of benefits. She seems not to be aware that the real value of the label in the eyes of its supporters and users lies not so much in alleged benevolences derivable from its general adoption, as in its force as a weapon to bring business and business men under the control of trade unions as representing working men. This is quite in accordance with the general assumption of many, if not of most artisans, of some of the newspapers, and of a large body of the public, that the working classes would be better managers of business, if they could once really get hold of it, than are the men who create, extend, and dominate all larger concerns, as a matter of fact; their sincere belief being that if all who are not capitalists could sequester the property of those who are, they both could

and would apply it to the general profit and benefit better and more effectually than do the greedy appropriators of opportunities who now misarrange the resources of the world to their own selfish aggrandizement alone. With that end in view, they prize the union label as an effective weapon to bring more business under the control of the working classes. The real virtue of the label in their eyes is that it is a fighting instrument in the hands of trade unions to advance their own power and secure their own ends. It is not, as Miss Kelley avers, a substitute for the strike and the boycott, but it is a device to make the boycott more efficient, wider in its range, and more easily applied. All other advantages which it may possess are secondary to its coerciveness in this direction. A little examination of the methods used by its promoters will show how essentially warlike its intentions and purposes are.

In the first place, the union label would have no force at all if it were used, as its advocates pretend, simply to indicate that the goods to which it is attached have been made under conditions suitable to the well-being of the workmen. Not one consumer in a thousand would ever buy an article for such a reason. The consumer buys because he wants the thing he purchases, and because he is satisfied with its quality and price. He no more thinks of asking how its maker lives than he thinks of asking about the living of the farmer of whom he buys his wheat, or the condition of the men who grew his sugar or tea. Such inquiries reach too far beyond the possible circle of business activities to be prescribed to any great extent. One has too much to do to keep one's own conditions satisfactory to oneself to ask about the concerns of people who make his soap and shoes and hats and starch and nails and bicycles and boats, nor could any society or union, or group of societies or unions, make sure beyond a very narrow circle that all kinds of goods were produced under conditions the best for their producers. If they did do this, the supervision itself would be so expensive as to make a serious addition to the price of the goods. It would put them out of the reach of ordinary buyers, who can only afford what they buy when rates are low. In fact, as matters now stand, it is stoutly asserted by men who have personally examined the facts that union labels have been found on tenement-house made cigars and sweat-shop clothing. And it is plain that until work-

men are all enrolled and drilled to supervision far beyond what the ordinary American citizen would like or allow, it will not be possible to control the conditions of his production beyond a narrow limit. All vouchers for any such proceeding are, therefore, on their face suspicious, and require extensive and accumulated proof of their truth. The union label, as such, is but a poor and easily eluded guarantee, calculated to deceive only those who wish to be deceived.

But the union label used as a weapon of war to extend and enforce the boycott is quite another matter. Then its efficiency becomes at once aggressive and visible. The trade unions adopt it and agree to boycott all shops selling goods without the label attached. They then appoint committees to go about and examine the goods of various retailers in every city. They inform the retailer that certain makes of his goods are without the label, and that his name will be listed and notices of his dereliction sent to all their unions if he persists in selling them. He is, of course, alarmed at such a prospect, as he well knows its meaning to be that a large body of customers will be warned against buying at his shop. He wishes to keep goods salable to all, and he rushes off, therefore, to buy goods having the label attached. The makers of unlabelled goods are then left in the lurch, and thus are boycotted into asking the unions for permission to use the label. The unions reply that the label will be sold to all shops which employ only union men to do their work. The union then prescribes the rate of wages, the number of hours of work, and as many other details as it sees fit, and at last graciously consents that the firm may use the label. The result is all very well for the union and their members. The retailers have been forced into offering only union-made goods to the public, thereby ensuring that only union men shall be employed to make goods.

But how about the other nine-tenths of workmen who, according to Mr. John Graham Brooks,\* are not union men? They are to be shut out from work and thrown out of employment by the union label. Shops that employ them are estopped from selling the goods they produce, because the label is only permitted to union-filled shops. Manufacturers must, therefore,

\* Mr. Brooks stated, without contradiction, that in this country only one workman in fourteen was a union man, which also is confirmed by Mr. Samuel Gompers.

refuse work to all but union men, must employ the union men at whatever cost, must raise the prices of goods on their customers to meet the additional expense, and thereby cut off from buying all poorer classes of customers who can no longer afford the goods at enhanced values. Doubtless, this effective slashing to right and left will ensure, with a vengeance, "favorable conditions to the makers of goods"—the cost being only that nine-tenths of workmen are prevented from getting work at all and are thereby impoverished, while perhaps five-tenths of consumers are prevented from using goods by increased prices.

Talk about the rich being made richer and the poor poorer. You have it here in all its naked clearness, except that this effect is produced not by the dreadful capitalist, but by so-called fellow-workmen. They grind the faces of the poor, on both sides, to a very sharp edge. One-tenth seek to confiscate to themselves, by the assistance of the public, the whole living of the other nine-tenths, on the ground that then they will be able to do their work under favorable conditions. Some such result would not be surprising, seeing that it is an ill wind that blows nobody good.

If the object of this boycott of the workmen were to coerce them into joining the unions, it would be intelligible, though still unfair, as all have an equal right to liberty and a living. The unions, indeed, would thrive and grow rich and powerful, but at the expense of unwilling members. In any case, individual liberty is threatened; the right of men to make free contracts with each other is barred.

That the main intention of the union label is to serve as a weapon to enforce the boycott is made evident by the circulars and letters of one of the strongest trade unions, "The United Hatters of North America." They say:

"In May, 1894, we issued a circular calling attention to eleven *non-union or scab*\* concerns at Danbury, Connecticut, and requested organized labor to assist our unions to bring this unfair (*i. e.*, non-union) and wealthy combination to terms. . . . We would most earnestly appeal to you to help us in our fight against these employers of scab or non-union labor, and ask as a special favor that you appoint committees to visit the retail hat dealers in your locality, and inform them that they are not obliged to purchase hats from people who handle goods of foul or non-union shops, or in other words are not entitled to use the union label."

\* In trade union language everything is "scab" when it is not altogether union. Every free and independent workman, every shop which employs men indifferently, whether they are union or non-union, is scab. To the trade unionist the most of the world is scab.

Many firms are boycotted by name in this circular, and no claim is made that they did not pay good wages, nor that their hats were made under improper conditions, nor that they were oppressive to their workmen. The sole and only alleged ground of their proscription is that they employed scab or non-union labor—that is, some of the nine-tenths of laborers who did not belong to the unions.

Again, in like vein, their circular says: "Members of labor organizations should urge retailers in their localities to insert in their orders that all hats, both soft and stiff, must have the union label in them, or they will be returned." Since the union label means only that the hats are made by union men, no hats though made under all proper conditions by non-union men could get the label in any case. It is clear, therefore, that the union, rather than "proper conditions" of manufacture, was the object of supreme attention. Having a like motive, the secretary of the Beer Drivers' Union warns a hat dealer, who buys hats where he chooses, that "so long as you patronize a scab hat firm we cannot stand by you, because we as union must stand by unions." To the same purport we read the letter of a Denver firm, saying that they are able "to guarantee every hat sold, and that they are of union make," and claiming patronage on that account. Other letters sent out guarantee that a certain hat company "is now a union concern, employing union men, and *consequently* entitled to use the union label of the United Hatters of North America." Envelopes of this organization also carry the exhortation: "Ask for hat with union label. Do not wear the product of non-union labor."

Further testimony as to the boycotting intention of the union label is found in the by-laws of the United Hatters of North America, printed in January, 1896, which say:

"Local associations must affiliate with central labor unions, trade assemblies, or other central labor organizations.

"(Sec. 2.) One-half of the per capita tax or monthly dues levied by said central bodies shall be paid by the National Association."

Still another witness is an official contribution of money by the United Hatters of North America to the Central Labor Union of Brooklyn to assist the Central Labor Union of New York in boycotting a certain firm which employed scabs.

We have also the printed address of the president of the

United Hatters, and remarks in print of their secretary, who complained of the action of a Danbury society that "it placed the national body in a peculiar position, for they would have to boycott firms who would run union factories if the union would let them." In other words, the label supporters would do all in their power to drive out of business those who had not previously adopted the label, whether willing at present to do so or not.

The same is true of other unions. Some are not so powerful yet as the hatters, but their aims are the same. The Garment Makers Union, the Typographical Union, the Bakers, Shoemakers, Ironmakers, and many others are pushing the compulsory use of the union label by the same methods for the same purpose. They each and all aim to control manufacturers through retailers to the end that none but union-made goods shall be sold. They intend thereby to prevent any men from getting work in their trades excepting union men, and meanwhile they make no provisions for such an enlargement of the unions as should include all good artisans in any trade. In fact, they scarcely contemplate any increase beyond such as would simply replace the losses of unions by death, not in any way endeavoring to keep up with the natural expansion of the community. That their action is perpetually crowding to the wall a large majority of workmen, the most helpless of their class, they do not heed, so long as their own class does the crowding. If it were the action of capitalists they would decry it as a great crime, but, being their own, they commend it to the public with enthusiasm. So much difference does it make whose bull has gored the ox!

For ourselves, we believe their methods to be injurious to themselves, to their fellow-workmen, and to the public. We believe them to be prolonging the poverty from which we all alike wish to escape. We believe them to be of the nature of a civil war between two portions of the great industrial army, and, like all wars, only destructive of humanity's interests.

Such objects and practises, of course, tend to so serious a restriction of trade that jobbers and retailers would welcome any release from the tyranny that embargoes their right to buy and sell whatever customers may wish to purchase. Consumers also are now limited in their choice of goods, since many excellent goods are not offered because they lack the union label. Free and independent shops, where formerly non-union men could

get a living, are now forced to become union shops and to employ union men only, whereby many excellent workmen are deprived of a livelihood in spite of the laws and of the rights belonging to men inalienably. Skilled, competent, and faithful employees must be discharged at the mere word of these self-made censors who are striving to improve the condition of the workmen (we have their word for it), in all they do.

And to show how the label works, we have only to note that it raises the price of goods so much in the production of certain goods that it can only be used on the better qualities whose buyers are able to pay more, and not at all on the lower qualities where a rise of price would cut off consumption.

The finest and best goods are made to a considerable extent without the union label in free and independent shops, while the lowest-priced goods are rarely, if ever, made in union shops. By the best use of improved machinery and methods of economy in manufacture, the shops which employ both union and non-union men are able to cheapen the cost of production while maintaining a good earning capacity for a reasonable amount of labor on the part of their employees, and the surrounding conditions of their non-union shops are withal as good as the best.

In view of these facts it is idle for Miss Kelley to assert that "the union label is constructive and not destructive." It can only construct by destroying. Idle also is her remark that "it builds up the fair (*i. e.*, union) employers' trade, instead of tearing down the unfair (*i. e.*, non-union) employers' business as did the boycott," since the label works only by boycott. Idle also her allegation that "it will improve the condition of the non-unionist or scab, as trade unions have improved them otherwise." That is, by keeping them out of work, driving them from their homes, breaking up shops that employ them, and the like. Who was it that made the phrase—"Improve them off the face of the earth"?

What subterfuge also is it that leads Miss Kelley to say that "the trade union never urges its label upon an employer, nor does any employer apply to a union for the use of the label till he is confronted with a demand from a sufficient number of customers to make it worth his while to have it placed in the goods that he has for sale." *Sancta simplicitas!* His "customers" are the retailers whose shops have been visited by committees of



unionists and whose goods have been examined by men who tell them that "it isn't necessary to buy goods without the label," with all that phrase implies. "Demand from customers," indeed! It is the same euphony as when one is said to have resigned an office from which he really was dismissed. Miss Kelley also avers that "before the union label can be of consequence, there must be a purchasing public interested in creating a demand for it." If the label had waited for that, it would have waited till the millennium. But it did not, and does not wait. It demands to be used on penalty of war against those who will not use it.

Miss Kelley herself seems to have some inkling of its real force when she says: "Its universal adoption would of course bring its special advantages to an end"—as if the universal adoption of fitting improvements in the condition of producers (the label's alleged intention) would bring such special advantages to an end. What it would do would be merely to bring its power as an instrument of the boycott to an end.

These things make it clear that the unions are the object of all this care and organization, that the real intention is to destroy the scabs or non-union men who are at least nine-tenths of all the workmen, that no means will be refused that assist in that one deadly purpose, and that every producer who does not yield to the demands of the unions will be ruined if the unions can ruin him, quite irrespective of his justice, honor, good treatment of men, scale of wages, conditions of shop, and all the other verbal demands of the union label organization. What the public, then, is called upon to do is to support the unions against the scabs, that is, the free, independent workmen; to back the authors of strikes, boycotts, representing less than one-tenth of all workmen, against the other nine-tenths of those who are willing to work as honestly and as faithfully as the best for wages which employers are able and willing to pay. The public is invited and urged to make itself a partner in all the boycotts the unions may declare against employers, and to take sides against the majority of workmen for the sake of the minority.

And this is by no means all. The unions are reaching out by compulsion, in the use of the union label, through all business to bring it to their terms. Already there are twenty *national* unions engaged in enforcing its use. In September last

the United Hatters voted to affiliate with the American Federation of Labor, comprising 600,000 members, which gives them immense additional power. With a disciplined army of advocates so numerous and very active, it is easy to see that they wield a power capable of bringing extreme pressure to bear upon retailers, and through them upon manufacturers in almost every domain of business. They form, in fact, a vast dominating trade union trust, which by its pressure can dictate to every great manufacturing body what men they shall employ as laborers, to the retailers what goods they shall sell in their shops, and to all workmen what work they shall be permitted to do or not to do, according to their will. It will be seen at once that such comprehensive powers throw into the shade all that is arrogated by any other trust, whether it be the Standard Oil, Tobacco, Sugar, or whatever trust is most spoken against by the enemies of such aggregations. None of these aspires to manage any business but its own at any rate, and not one reaches to the power of life and death which lies in the hands of those who control the employment of laborers and dictate as to who shall and who shall not have a chance to earn his bread. And when one knows beforehand that this last power will be exercised after the accustomed violent fashion of unions towards all but its own members, by cutting off free or independent workmen on every side, watching their movements, picketing shops where scabs are permitted to work, persuading, terrorizing, spying, and, in fact, performing all the acts of war upon outsiders, one may well hesitate to throw his influence in favor of furthering the aims of an organization so harsh and exclusive towards men of its own kind.

It should be remarked, too, that the violent outcry of working men against the trusts of capitalists must have little weight with those who see in the union label nothing less than an attempt to organize the same sort of combination in their own interest. Their attempt appears to be to stifle the competition of laborers with themselves, as capitalists extinguish it in their own ranks. They are trying to limit production to what union men can produce, setting aside a larger body of the laboring class. They are trying to prevent all production below a certain rate of wages which they wish to prescribe, not heeding the needs of workmen who cannot be employed at such rates because

they are not worth them. They wish to prevent a fall in the price of goods, forgetful of the fact that such declines bring goods within the reach of multitudes who otherwise could not purchase at all. They are ready to coerce all vendors who shall sell other goods than those of their approval. They would limit production as the coal barons are said to do; would limit selling as the Tobacco Trust is accused of doing; would monopolize the labor supply as Italian padrones are blamed for doing; would starve some kinds of workmen as cloakmakers were accused of doing; would close non-consenting factories, which the Standard Oil Trust was reprobated for doing; would cut off the public from various brands of desirable goods, which no trust ever even attempted; would finally control many enterprises for which they furnish neither the plant, the capital, nor the brains, and in which they neither take the risks nor devise the policy.

Surely it is asking of the public more than any trust ever demanded, that it should lend its support to help the union label to a power so general and irresponsible and so clearly opposed to the welfare of a large body of citizens whose interests are vital to the public good. No other trust ever asked of the public support for itself alone on the grounds of its public benevolence.

If the trade unions had proved to be half as wise as they are active and aggressive, if they had been as kind to their fellow-workmen as they have been cruel, if they had looked to the general welfare as carefully as they have to what they fancy to be their own, if they had endeavored to be as useful as they were powerful, one might indeed regard every advance made by them with pleasure and advocate its further development. But, with their past unruly history, it is indeed a grave matter to give force to so drastic a supervision as the union label puts into their hands exclusively. Its general adoption would go far to make them masters of the business community. Its support by citizens at large would be little else than a surrender of the whole working class to their imperious orders. Its prevalence would bring under their rule the ever servile body of politicians looking for votes, until at last the government itself would scarce be able to do otherwise than pass trade union laws and register trade union decrees. That this result would be good either for the community at large or for the unions themselves we who

have observed their history may be permitted to doubt. Working men are not equal to everything any more than philosophers. We are not ourselves opposed to trade unions in themselves, operating in their own proper sphere of mutually assisting and co-operative societies. Therein they have done and are doing much good. They inspire, encourage, and stimulate their members. They develop their reasoning powers and mutually educate each other. They lend the force and courage of co-operation to those who singly are weak and unprotected. They substitute bodies of organized and disciplined citizens, always an improved and better class, for fragmentary and scattered mobs of individuals. They have caused many excellent laws to be passed for the protection of the working man. They have developed many good leaders whose work has been an addition to the welfare of the state. We do not wish to suppress them, nor to dispense with their counsel and co-operation. We believe most heartily that everybody knows far more than anybody, and that all classes together are far wiser than any one class, even if it be called the best. We therefore view with pleasure the efforts of the union to further the progress and expand the horizon of the community.

But with all this, we do not view with pleasure the efforts of unions to set up within the state another organization of compulsion. We do not believe in organizing one body of citizens against others, to compel them by fear of loss and starvation to obey the will of self-made despots. We reprobate their efforts to enlist the assistance of all their friends in an attempt to give them power to dragoon the business world into obedience to their behests. Were they wiser than Solomon, this still would be dangerous. But, as they are only half instructed in business concerns, such authority could only result in unspeakable disaster from which they would be the first and greatest sufferers.

If the union label simply set itself to carry out its claim of guaranteeing that the goods to which it is attached were made under satisfactory sanitary and other conditions, it would be easy for any manufacturer to get the right to use it who should show conformity to proper requirements, and this could be readily ascertained by the advocates of the label, though it would still enhance the cost of goods, and according to their claim they make it their business to do just this, if nothing else. But that would put all good manufacturers on a level and tend speedily to ele-

vate all work done, so that it would benefit the union little, if at all. Therefore, the label body devotes itself to quite another object, as we have shown, namely, simply to find out whether union men do the work, or non-union men. If they were to permit goods made under howsoever excellent conditions, but at less cost than union goods, to be sold at the same counters at cheaper rates, the careless public would always buy the cheaper, and so fail to support the unions. High prices have never been a public craving, and never will be. To support producers in fine style has never been the professed purpose of buyers. To make laborers happy may be the object of benevolence, but business has other and severer aims, and must so long as life itself is a struggle for existence. How well the union label people manage their side of the competitive struggle is shown from the fact that they give a boom to the first baker who uses their label, that their wives insist on the label in garments they buy, that unions have induced Montana to require the label on all public printing, that the Utica Common Council required labels on all iron-moulding done for public works, that a cigar maker in New York was stopped from selling his goods because his prices were too low to suit the unionists, that a manufacturing house up the Hudson was crowded out of business because it would not make terms with the union. In all this one observes that scant regard is paid by the unions to any interest except their own. They have no right to claim as a general benefit what is after all only a special one, and that one their own.

Now if the unions, instead of devising a union label to increase the effect of the boycott by forcing retailers to buy union-made goods at higher prices on penalty of ruin if they sold other goods, would devise a label which should mean superior goods for less money, which would ensure the customer that he was getting his money's worth in quality and finish, they would not need to go to the expense of sending committees round to examine every retailer's stock for their label. The community would be eager enough to buy such articles and the unions would thrive upon the skill and honesty of their members, rather than on their brutality and arrogance toward their fellows.

A union label which should mean that the interest and well-being of laborers in general had been studied and secured, would have in its favor not only the one-tenth of union men, but the

nine-tenths of non-union men—but for that we may wait many years, since in it there would be no profit for any special class, no money for its promoters, no power for its advocates, but only general benevolence and fair play for all.

Now of what we have been saying this is the sum:

*First.* The union label is mainly a distinctive device for enforcing boycotts and making them more effective.

*Second.* Its object is to increase the power of trade unions and to force all to submit to union authority.

*Third.* Its asserted purpose—to insure good conditions among working men—is mere pretence, since the label is not allowed to all manufacturers who can prove their conditions to be satisfactory, but only to those who employ none but union workmen.

*Fourth.* The circulars of its advocates harp on the employment of union men only and say little about their vaunted “good conditions.”

*Fifth.* The claim of the label to the support of good citizens is, therefore, unwarranted, unless good citizens ought always to support trade unions and repudiate free and independent workmen.

*Sixth.* The general success of the label would result in raising the prices of goods, reducing the employment of free workmen, curtailing the liberty of contract between employers and employed, injuring many skilled and useful non-union laborers, and give to the unions a new and wide power in the community equivalent to a real tyranny, a most un-American and dangerous enlargement.

*Seventh.* It would seem, therefore, to be better that the community should oppose the use of the label and refuse to buy the goods on which it appears, preferring to favor the nine-tenths of laborers who are not union men to the one-tenth who are, because the one-tenth are seeking by the label to abridge the rights of the others in the common pursuit of life, liberty, and happiness.

STARR HOYT NICHOLS.